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Aetopteron as a Generic Name

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It was indeed startling to read in the last number of the American Fern Journal (10: 88) that there was an earlier valid name for *Polystichum*. To me, at least, it was still more startling to read the assertion concerning Ehrhart's name *Aetopteron*: "The type is clearly indicated to be *Polypodium aculeatum* L. No generic description is given, *but the intent of the author is quite clear*" (italics mine). Evidently the writer of these words failed to observe that Ehrhart carefully explains his intent.

Ehrhart prepared and distributed a set of exsiccatae under the title "Phytophylacium," and inserted in his Beiträge (4: 145-150. 1789) a list of the species (ten decades, or one hundred in all). Each species in the list is assigned a single name, followed by its current binary one. At the end of the list is the following explanation; the translation here given is rather free, but I believe closely approximates the sense of the original: "I must here omit, for lack of space, the locality where each plant was collected. I have reprinted, however, my 'nomina usualia'. Not that it seems to me to be of very much consequence, since they are nothing but an attempt to assign to each plant a name, that may be used for it alone, without an accompanying generic one, as suggested by Oeder in his 'Einleitung zur Kräuterkenntniss,' §141; but that a certain man by the name of Dahl, who is a particular friend of the idea, might derive some amusement from it, and that I might accomodate him."

The suggestion of Oeder,* mentioned above, may be freely translated as follows:

"There may be proposed, for common non-botanical conversational use, names which we may call nomina

*Oeder. Elementa botanicae 134. 1764.—I have not seen the German translation cited by Ehrhart.

'usualia,' always independent names, having no connection or relation to classification, to genus, or to specific relationship, but one for each species, relating to itself alone. It will be permissible, then, for species known by these 'nomina usualia' to be arranged freely by botanists in their respective systems and transferred at will, to be associated in genera and to be re-classified, for under all these changes of methods each name would remain unchanged."

Under these circumstances it appears to me that "the intent of the author *is* quite clear," but this intent is certainly not to publish or even to suggest *Aetopteron* as a generic name. The mere fact that Ehrhart's list of a hundred plants includes fourteen monomial designations for as many species of *Carex* ought to be sufficient to suggest extreme caution in interpreting the significance of these names, even if his explanation were overlooked.

In view of the comparatively small number of plant species then known, it is a little strange that Oeder's suggestion did not meet with wider acceptance. As far as I am aware it was never tried out by anyone except Ehrhart, and by him only in this one instance. Many years afterward Aubert du Petit Thouars used a somewhat similar method, apparently thought out quite independently, applying monomials to each species of Madagascar orchids, but his attempt attracted no imitators.

The number of names that would be required for the vast throng of species now recognized renders the use of such a method at the present time wholly impracticable. Yet there are doubtless many of us who would hail with delight any equally simple but practicable scheme for divorcing nomenclature from taxonomy.

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